

19,500 volunteers clear Salt River of flood trash

By Mark Shaffer
The Arizona Republic

DeeAnn Daily didn't really care about being part of what the governor called the largest volunteer environmental cleanup effort in U.S. history.

Daily, an Avondale office worker, was a lot more interested Saturday morning in how to remove a piece of moldy, mud-caked carpet wrapped around the roots of a tamarisk tree in the Salt River channel near Phoenix International Raceway.

She tugged and tugged at the carpet, sweat glistening on her arms in the sunshine, only to have the carpet rip at ground level.

"Oh, I don't know what to do about this," Daily said dejectedly.

"I guess we'll have to wait till the next flood to wash it up."

But that small piece of buried carpet was one of the few pieces of trash that got away from about 19,500 volunteers along 39 miles of the Salt below Granite Reef Diversion Dam on the Great Salt River Cleanup day.

By 11 a.m. Saturday, with 12,653 bags of trash weighing 127 tons en route to a landfill near Mobile, Gov. Fife Symington called the volunteer effort the best of its kind.

"We've just beaten Arkansas," Symington said, referring to that state's annual cleanup at Greer Ferry and the most trash ever collected at that event.

"This is just a wonderful event. It shows that civic spirit here is strong."

That spirit even extended to the homeless. Symington said a man became a co-captain of a cleanup team after it met him and other members of five homeless families on one area of the Salt.

Heavy rains in February that flooded the Valley and western Arizona washed mountains of garbage down the Salt, primarily from the Tri-City Landfill in the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

Almost 700 tons of debris, including 15,000 tires, already had been removed by Phoenix municipal and U.S. Forest Service employees and state-prison in-



Tom Story/The Arizona Republic
Volunteer Rick Barry works hard during the Great Salt River Cleanup. Thirty-nine miles of the Salt were spruced up by volunteers Saturday.

mates. But there was plenty left for the thousands of volunteers who fanned out Saturday.

Cliff Staley, a Glendale real-estate agent, said he found all kinds of stuff along the river, including pieces of plastic milk cartons, cans and a bag used for intravenous hookups.

But Staley said the things he noted with most interest were several plastic bags he found.

"They were the zip-lock kind," he said. "And even after what they went through, the zip lock still worked. I couldn't believe it."

Ried Horton of Glendale, a student at Cactus High School,

said he found a gas tank and an *Arizona Republic* vending machine half-covered with sand beneath a bridge over the river.

"There weren't any papers inside. It would have been neat to know the date of when it washed down the river," Horton said.

Daily said the most interesting things she found were a rusted auto muffler and two flasks, one of which still had liquor inside.

"I go tubing down the Salt a lot and water-skiing at Bartlett Lake," Daily said.

"I figured this was the least I could do for all the nice things this river has done for me."